

The W.Va. Agricultural Statistics Service

This service collects, summarizes and distributes agricultural information for the state and is recognized as the official source of agricultural statistics. Under this cooperation, there is no duplication of effort by the state and federal agencies. Currently, there are similar agreements in 35 states, of which the West Virginia office was one of the first. Funding for the WV Agricultural Statistics Service is provided entirely by the United States Department of Agriculture.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service was established as the USDA Division of Statistics in 1863. Since 1866, it has published a continuing series of reports on major crops, livestock and agricultural prices. The ever-increasing need for data in the field of agriculture has caused the program to expand to more than 100 farm products. Various reports contain current forecasts of production, annual conditions and annual disposition of agricultural commodities. Information on the prices of items in production, prices received for output and amount and type of labor used are also collected and published. Users of these data are farmers, processors, distributors, transportation industries, lending institutions, governments, and individuals. Price fluctuations and potential world-wide shortages have broadened the interest in agricultural data tremendously in the past several years.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service also has the responsibility of conducting the Census of Agriculture on a 5-year cycle. The census of agriculture is the leading source of statistics about the United State's agricultural production and the only source of consistent, comparable data at the county, state and national levels. Census statistics are used by Congress to develop and change farm programs, study historical trends, assess current conditions and plan for the future. Many national and state programs use census data to design and allocate funding for extension service projects, agricultural research, soil conservation programs and land-grant colleges and universities. Private industry uses census statistics to provide a more effective production and distribution system for the agricultural community.

Sources of Information: Farmers and agriculturally-related businesses are the source of practically all information gathered by the West Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service. Collection of these data are voluntary and primarily by three methods: personal interview, telephone interview, and mail surveys. Most interviews are conducted by enumerators employed by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). Quarterly Agricultural Surveys are conducted to collect crop and livestock information. These interview surveys combine samples of areas of land and large operators to give estimates based on known probabilities of error. Mail surveys collect information, primarily from farmers, on crop acreage, conditions and yields, as well as livestock inventories, milk and egg production and prices. Our office maintains a list of more than 20,000 names and addresses of farmers and farm-related businesses to use as the source for our survey work. By federal law, all answers provided by farmers on their questionnaires remain confidential and are used only to form state and national summaries. The personal information goes no further than the office of the West Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service.